

## Let's Face It; Students Are Pretty Magical

An interview with  
Nalo Hopkinson

Yang-Yang Wang (CW '14)  
Jae Steinbacher (CW '14)

CW: How does it feel to be the youngest SFWA Damon Knight Grand Master?

NH: Awesome. It feels like being seen by my peers. And it tells me that I've done some shit, which doesn't always feel true when I'm in the trenches and just trying to meet those deadlines.

CW: What are some of the lessons you've learned when teaching online?

NH: I've learned you can't replace a three-hour class in meatspace with a three-hour class on Zoom. That's a good way to exhaust everyone, especially yourself. I'm learning asynchronous teaching methods in which students work on the course material according to their own schedules, and if we meet at all via



Nalo Hopkinson

Credit: David Findley, 2017

*Nalo Hopkinson's fiction has received the Campbell and Locus Awards, the World Fantasy Award, and the Sunburst Award for Excellence in Canadian Literature of the Fantastic. She is a professor of creative writing and a member of a faculty research cluster in science fiction and has taught for the Clarion West Six-Week Summer Workshop in 2001, 2006, 2009, and 2015 (and will teach again in 2021).*

it influenced speech and voice in your writing?

NH: Well, there's something about this question that I think risks misrepresenting what I do. I don't wander around collecting other people's accents like souvenirs to put on display. I do pay attention to how the rhythms of natural speech flow and try to create a sense of flow in my written dialogue.

We may be on lockdown, but I'm still speaking with people and they with me. People still record themselves and/or are recorded, and the recordings made available on the news, on YouTube, on social media. There's lots of opportunity for hearing and exchanging language with people.

CW: In addition to writing and teaching, you make dolls, create cast resin objects, and cook. What are some ways you've found balance over the past year?

NH: To be honest, I haven't. This past year has been a hot mess for me, just as it has for most people. Additionally, ►

► I've realized just how difficult it is to be a maker of things when you don't have space to do so. I've never had that. There's nowhere in my apartment to lay out cloth, to work safely with materials such as resin, to store tools and materials in an accessible way. That's my dream for my next home. Luckily, I do have a kitchen that functions well enough, so I can still cook. I'm doing a bit more of it. It's been good for my health to eat out less. I don't cook elaborate meals. They may be fancy, but they're quick and usually easy to prepare. I enjoy cooking. It's like science you can eat.

CW: In last summer's Write-a-thon, you offered a prompt for students to write a creation myth as a recipe. Do you have a favorite dish that could contain a world? Do you have a favorite myth or folktale? Do you have a favorite fantastical beast or entity?

NH: I'll respond to all three of those by saying that I don't have those kinds of favorites, or I try not to — African mermaids/snake goddesses do show up an awful lot in my writing. But I'm aware of that, so will consciously move on to other things.

CW: What's your latest read, show, or other media recommendation?

NH: The movie *Space Sweepers*, from director Jo Sung-Hee. Look at what he does with language; all the languages and accents (and by extension, faces and races) are incorporated smoothly into the story. There's so much more going on in the film, including the delightful surprise to do with the character of Bubs. But it was the linguistic/racial

representation that put it over the top for me.

CW: What's one lesson you wish all your students would come to class knowing?

NH: I've been astonished that the majority of undergrad-level students who want to be writers come to us unable to write functional sentences because they have no awareness of the deep structures of language.

I'm talking about intelligent people who are wonderfully creative and imaginative, many of them fairly adroit verbally. But something happens when they try to do the same with prose; it comes out garbled and they don't recognize that it's garbled.

I don't care whether they're formally taught or not. It's not about whether they know the words for the parts of speech. That's not necessary at the beginning. That's stuff they can pick up. School wasn't where I learned to make internally congruent sentences. By the time I was being made to learn grammar or write essays, I had already mostly absorbed that skill. I'm not sure how to help my students absorb it.

The good news is that for all my whining, most students do autocorrect. Some-

where around year three of a four-year BFA in Creative Writing, their sentences start to improve, their facility with language has grown, and their written language is more muscular. It's kind of magical. Let's face it; students are pretty magical. And it means I no longer have to try to teach remedial language — not my training — and can get on with teaching how to craft a piece of fiction. ♦



Credit: Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons

# Clarion West Writers Workshop

2021

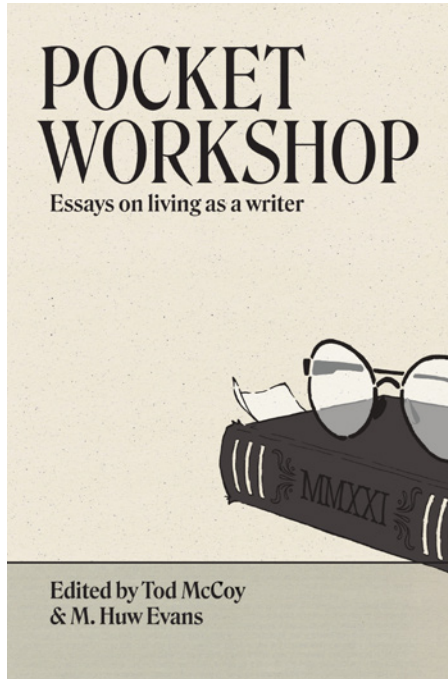
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# Living as a Writer



An Interview with  
Tod McCoy (CW '10)  
& M. Huw Evans (CW '12)

EMILY C. SKAFTUN (CW '09)

*Clarion West alumni Tod McCoy and M. Huw Evans are, among other things, the co-editors of Pocket Workshop: Essays on Living as a Writer. Tod is currently the chair of the Clarion West board as well as the publisher of Hydra House. He lives outside Missoula, where he accidentally snubbed James Lee Burke at the post office.*

*Huw describes himself as a sometime writer, an increasingly frequent editor, an ex-physician pathologist, an always dad, and a creator of magic wands. Since the three of us are well acquainted, we used this interview as an excuse for a (virtual) happy hour.*

*What follows are mere excerpts of our conversation.*

Emily C. Skaftun: How did *Pocket Workshop* come about?

Tod McCoy:

I had a very small press about 20 years ago where I did a few books of poetry, and after Clarion West, I got that bug again to publish. It's a great avenue to raise some money (about 90% of the profits from *Pocket Workshop* are going to Clarion West). So I came up with this idea: Is there a way to create a book that embodies a lot of the wisdom that you get out of Clarion West and put it out there for people?

M. Huw Evans: I'd helped out a little bit with *Telling Tales* [a collection of short stories that was another fundraising collaboration between Hydra House and Clarion West], kind of orbiting the Hydra House gravity well. Last March, I told Tod, "If Hydra House wants some proofreading or copyediting, I'd love to do some more free work and get some more practice."

TM: That was when it clicked. Because I thought: Huw is perfect to do this. He's been the workshop administrator; he knows people; he's got the editing chops. Honestly, I will say right now, I couldn't have done it without you, Huw.



Tod McCoy

Credit: Nikki Rossignol



M. Huw Evans

MHE: Well, I am honored to have been invited. It's gotten me through this year.

ECS: How did you choose what to include?

TM: Our number one criterion was to get people who had taught at the workshop [or a One-Day Workshop]. We had a pretty wide range of people to choose from. We wanted to make sure that it was as diverse as possible, because we wanted it to reflect the workshop.

MHE: We dropped [topic] hints in a few ears. Like when somebody is the master of voice, you might mention the theme of voice, and they might be delighted to write an essay about voice.

TM: I told Nancy Kress I liked her swimming pool theory on getting started in a story — where you push off and glide for a little bit, which is essentially the infodump area — and when she wrote her essay, she included that. But everybody pretty much came up with their own ideas.

MHE: There are recurring themes. Like Eileen [Gunn]'s essay is all about being blocked, and then Hiromi [Goto]'s essay is about not being able to write, and a good chunk of Susan Palwick's essay is about deliberately writing slowly. There are a whole lot of overlapping elements in different essays, but I feel like they complement each other.

TM: One of the more interesting developments in the genesis of the whole project was that originally I thought about making it kind of a how-to. As the essays came in, we realized that they're really more than that. Eileen is the one who came up with [the subtitle] "essays on living as a writer." That really fits. I realized that the book should reflect the workshop itself and how you get

▶ more out of it than just how to write. It's about community; it's about what else happens as a writer, and the things that a writer does or has to go through. This makes it a little bit different than most other writing books.

ECS: Here's an unfair question: Which essay is your favorite?

[awkward laughter]

MHE: It depends on which day I'm reading the book. I can tell you, the two that make me cry when I read them — in a good way — are Susan's and Hiromi's. In terms of kind of the soul of the writing experience: Karen Lord, and Hiromi, and Susan, and Ian [McDonald]. When you hit those four, kind of in that order, you have the writer's spiritual journey.

TM: There's a couple that really resonate with me. I really like Ian's list, "Proverbs of Hell for Writers." He's got like seventy-five of them listed in there. They're so interesting and so fun.

MHE: Ninety-four.

TM: Ninety-four? Whoa. One of the essays that really resonated with me was Octavia Butler's "Positive Obsession." It talks about her as a young Black girl, wanting to be a writer, and what she had to go through with her own family, and in publishing in general. It wasn't an experience I could directly relate to, but to me it was very profound. How writers really

have to push through obstacles to get where they want to be.

ECS: What do you hope readers take away from *Pocket Workshop*?

TM: That writing science fiction and fantasy is an attainable thing to do. This book is meant for people who are a little ways along and need a little boost in confidence or knowledge or something to get themselves to the next level. So I hope that people will read it and get some sense that yes, a pro career is a possibility.

MHE: My counter to that is that I hope people read it and recognize that their writing is worth doing regardless of whether they are able to do it professionally, and that writing is an absolute good in and of itself, and whatever you're able to do with it beyond the initial creation is fantastic, but not to undervalue just the process as it pertains only to yourself.

ECS: What are you working on now?

TM: This particular book gave rise to another book of writing advice that we are looking at publishing, probably in 2022, called *Ex Marginalia*. In brief, it's essays on writing from people from marginalized cultures. We have an editor that we're attempting to sign, who I think is going to be fantastic.

ECS: Have you been writing?

MHE: I've been writing more the past few months than in the previous few

years, but I don't really know much of what I've been writing, because I feel like my brain is telling me I can't write right now, but I'm fooling it by writing in the dark. Literally. I have a tiny little table next to my bed, and when I wake up and can't sleep, stressing about the world or whatever, there's a very dim red lamp over it, and I have this floppy notebook I sewed together with fancy paper. And I have a fountain pen that I really like writing with sitting there. So I'll just sit down. And obviously I have a vague idea of what I've written because my brain is mostly working, but I'm not reading over what I've written. I'm just writing based off what I remember having written.

ECS: This sounds cursed.

MHE: I'm sure it's terrible.

ECS: I didn't mean it that way. I meant literally cursed, like it's becoming an eldritch object.

TM: I've been making my own books as well, and I think it's gotten me to write more, because now I have this object that I actually made and put together myself, and I've been filling it with my own writing.

ECS: Do you have any survival tips for pandemic life?

[long pause]

MHE: Have a book that you can be working on that you don't have to write yourself. ♦

## MISSION STATEMENT

**We support emerging and underrepresented voices by providing writers with world-class instruction to empower their creation of wild and amazing worlds.**

**Through conversation and public engagement, we bring those voices to an ever-expanding community.**

# Nerdlesque

## Our Next Evolution Revealed!

EVAN J. PETERSON  
FUNDRAISING AND OUTREACH  
COORDINATOR

**Saturday, May 8  
7 p.m. Pacific**

Purchase tickets  
and browse  
auction items at  
<https://secure.qgiv.com/event/clarionwestnerdlesque/>



Credit: Meneflor Photography

Al Lykya, Nerdlesque performer

*Our first dinner and gala, the Nerdlesque, is planned as an annual fundraising event to raise unrestricted funds to support Clarion West's mission and growing community of writers. We're staying virtual, but you'll find the event highly interactive, and we know that you, dear reader, won't*

*want to miss this online auction:*  
<https://secure.qgiv.com/event/clarionwestnerdlesque/>

The Nerdlesque, in coordination with Revel Rouser Events, features five of Seattle's best burlesque performers as well as "nerdlesque" emcee and showgirl scholar Sailor St. Claire. Prepare for a night of science fiction- and fantasy-themed burlesque, bawdy storytelling, juicy auction packages, and more!

We spoke with Sasha Summer Cousineau, owner at Revel Rouser Events, and Sailor St. Claire, our mistress of ceremonies, about what makes Nerdlesque so great.

**CW:** What do you believe has made the burlesque revival, and the nerdlesque movement in particular, so popular?

**Sasha:** I think the platform of burlesque in general has leveled the playing field in many ways as to who gets to tell a story, who gets to celebrate themselves as sexy and sexual, and the fact that much of it is campy in tone makes it feel fun and less threatening than some other performance artforms. Nerdlesque feels a lot to me like the field of speculative fiction in the sense that it is largely women,



Credit: Miss Prys  
Briq House, Nerdlesque performer

POC, and queers saying, "Hey! We want to envision these stories in a way that includes us." **Sailor:** It's a performance genre that's about creating something that's authentic to you, with camp, humor, and glamour. And there's nothing more appealing to an audience than seeing someone perform their authentic self. As for nerdlesque, it is popular because fandom is popular. When you perform nerdlesque, you're literally embodying the things that you love. And from that place, you can also challenge them, revise them, and rewrite them — just like live action fan fiction.

**CW:** Are most of your audiences primarily men? Are you ever uncomfortable?

**Sasha:** Nope! My audiences have been primarily women. I have rarely felt uncomfortable during a performance, but on the occasions that I have, I have found a lot of safety inside of my character Diva le Déviant. Diva doesn't get scared, intimidated, threatened, bullied, or backed into a corner. In fact, she feels tickled that anyone would even try!



Sasha Summer Cousineau

**Sailor:** Burlesque is really for all genders, and it started that way back in the 1880s. The very first "burlesque shows" in America were theatrical drag shows with all-female casts doing parodies of classical drama. They were attended by men and women, and I think burlesque audiences and shows now really harken back to those roots. ►►

►CW: How do you interact with the audience, and how does your ideal audience react?

Sailor: As a host, I'm always interacting with the audience — asking questions, riffing with audience members when they respond positively to a joke or a moment from the show. I love an audience that's willing to return the energy that everyone onstage is sending their way, whether that's with laughter, or cheers, or gasps of delight.

Sasha: One of my biggest joys when it comes to burlesque audiences is the interactivity. It is not about us as performers just giving to you, it is an exchange of energy. I love how vocal burlesque audiences are! I love that they are up to play and be surprised.

CW: What should unfamiliar audience members know or anticipate going into a burlesque event?

Sailor: Burlesque shows are really fun environments in which you're

encouraged to let go from your day-to-day! Consent still matters in burlesque spaces, though. Performers consent to let you see them in various vulnerable states of undress, of emotion, of sensuality, but they do not consent to being touched without explicit permission. In virtual environments, that means no screenshots or sharing of images unless the host tells you it's okay.



Credit: Perris Blue Photo

Sailor St. Claire

Sasha: There will be boobs. And butts. Nudity! Yay! Be prepared to have your boundaries pushed. Be prepared to like it.\*

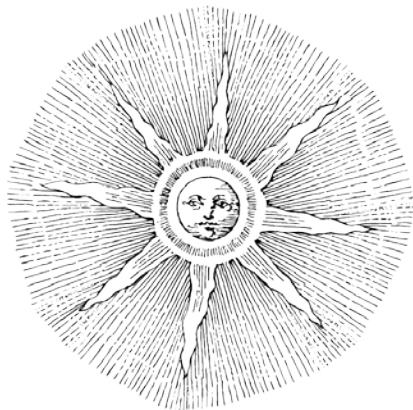
CW: If you could use burlesque to teach adults one thing, what would it be?

Sasha: You are the author of your story. Burlesque can be a space to express your core values, hopes, and dreams, your resistance and activism — it's a place where you can help yourself learn lessons, heal, and evolve.

Sailor: Confidence. Burlesque is a transformative experience for so many people because they create and become this whole new persona before they take the stage. I know so many performers who consider themselves introverts but just explode when they get onstage. Burlesque gives you the permission to be bold in ways the world often doesn't allow when you're a woman, or queer, or POC. And the more we hold on to that permission when we're out in the world, the better the world will be for it. ♦

\*This event can be considered TV-MA, for mature audiences. Parental guidance is suggested for kids under 16.

## Summer 2021 Updates



JAE STEINBACHER  
WORKSHOP COORDINATOR

Clarion West is trying something a little different this summer: the Six-Week Summer Workshop will be run as a virtual workshop, with students joining from a number of U.S. time zones; Ontario and British Columbia, Canada; Mexico; Brazil; and even the Philippines!

The group will spend six intense weeks in a virtual classroom with Andy Duncan, Eileen Gunn, Tina Connolly & Caroline Yoachim, Nalo Hopkinson, Sheree Renée Thomas, and Ted Chiang. And of course, they'll have opportunities to get to know the larger Clarion West community as well in online social spaces.

This year will be full of new experiences — we're putting together care packages for our cohort, offering

hybrid online/offline activities, parties in virtual spaces, pairing students with alumni mentors, and more! But at the end of it all, this group will have had their own unique six-week experience that we hope will develop the same camaraderie and steadfast bonds among them as our in-person workshop does.

### Speaking of Camaraderie ...

The (virtual) Write-a-thon will be back once again! Our first fully online Write-a-thon was a success last summer, and we'll be back with more craft talks, sprint sessions, and fun prompts to keep you writing (or reading!). We'll have more information about each week's events coming soon. ♦

# BEYOND AFROFUTURISM Black Editors and Publishers in Speculative Fiction

Join us for a series of conversations featuring today's Black publishers and editors of anthologies and magazines, aimed at expanding our understanding of the ways in which editorial roles impact the worlds of speculative fiction. All will be free to watch and will livestream to our YouTube channel on the following dates: April 12, May 16, and May 17. Register online here: <https://www.clarionwest.org/events>.

## Ancestors and Anthologies New Worlds in Chorus April 12, 6:30 p.m. Pacific



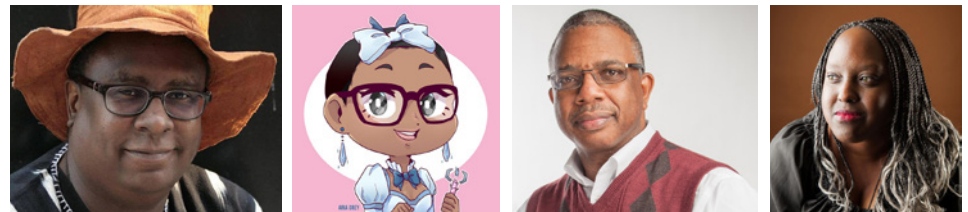
Maurice Broaddus Linda D. Addison Sheree Renée Thomas (CW '99) Nisi Shawl (CW '92)

Featuring: Maurice Broaddus (*People of Colo(u)r Destroy Horror, Dark Faith*), Linda D. Addison (*Sycorax's Daughters*), and Sheree Renée Thomas (*Dark Matter*)

From the groundbreaking *Dark Matter* to *Sycorax's Daughters* to *POC Destroy!*, anthologies are one way marginalized voices gather in chorus on a particular subject, subgenre, or genre. Our anthologies panel will delve into the world of bespoke collections with luminaries in the field, moderated by award-winning author and editor Nisi Shawl (*New Suns, Everfair, Stories for Chip: A Tribute to Samuel R. Delany*).

## Power in Publishing Publishers Roundtable

May 16, 1 p.m. Pacific



Bill Campbell Zelda Knight Milton Davis Nicole Givens Kurtz

Featuring: Bill Campbell (Rosarium Publishing), Zelda Knight (Aurelia Leo), Milton Davis (MVmedia), and Nicole Givens Kurtz (Mocha Memoirs Press)

With major publishers stuck in a cycle of selling the same mainstream stories or tightening their belts when it comes to the work of marginalized communities, how are Black publishers shaping opportunities for BIPOC writers to have their voices heard?

[more](#) ►►

▶ *The final panel in our online series,*  
**BEYOND AFROFUTURISM**  
 Black Editors  
 and Publishers in  
 Speculative Fiction

◀ *more on page 7*



# Zines and Magazines

## Expanding Worlds in Speculative Fiction

May 17, 7 p.m. Pacific



Craig Laurance Gidney (CW '96) (CW '14)



Eboni Dunbar



LaShawn Wanak



Brent Lambert

Featuring: Craig Laurance Gidney (Baffling Magazine), Chinelo Onwualu (Omenana/Anathema), Eboni Dunbar (FIYAH), LaShawn Wanak (GigaNotoSaurus), and Brent Lambert (FIYAH)

Join prominent Black editors of online zines and magazines as they discuss their journeys into editing and the role editors play in creating space for the voices of BIPOC communities in the speculative fiction field. Moderated by Arley Sorg of Locus and Fantasy Magazine. ♦



Arley Sorg